

G L O B A L A D V A N C E
Resources

Life
BOOK
V O L U M E I

*A Manual for
Personal and
Ministry Growth*

TOUCHING

LEADERS . . .

CHANGING

NATIONS

D A V I D S H I B L E Y

L I F E B O O K

by
David Shibley

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Contents

Introduction

ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL

1	The Good News We Preach	6
2	How to Know You Are God's Child	10
3	First Steps	13
4	Amazing Grace	16

CHARACTER AND CALLING

5	Five Faith Declarations	19
6	Ensuring a Fruitful, Long-Term Ministry	22
7	Approved to God	25
8	Called and Committed	28
9	Highly Favored	31
10	After God's Own Heart	34
11	A Separated Life	38
12	The Soul's Safeguard	42
13	Minister Here First!	45
14	Satan's Schemes	49
15	Living for What Matters	53

**A SELF-STUDY
COURSE FOR
PERSONAL AND
MINISTRY
DEVELOPMENT**

Introduction

You are important to the kingdom of God!

God wants to do great things through your life. He wants to use you to bring many people to faith in Christ. He wants to grow the ministry He has given you. God can use you to plant new churches. He can use you to impact your nation for Him. God can use you to spread His love to many people, even beyond the borders of your nation. He has great plans for you!

This requires a commitment on your part. You must commit to *grow*. The **LifeBook** is designed to help you grow in your walk with the Lord and as a minister of the gospel. This resource is provided by Christians who love you and believe in you. These lessons deal with our message, our character and our calling as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dale Witt, Global Advance associates and I go to many nations to take part in Global Advance's Frontline Shepherds Conferences. At these conferences we meet some of the finest servants of Christ in the world—people such as you. The desire of Global Advance is to place *a vision in the hearts and tools in the hands* of pastors and church leaders. God uses Frontline Shepherds Conferences to put a vision in the hearts of thousands of pastors. We are praying that He will use the **LifeBook** as a life-giving tool in their hands.

Here are some suggestions for getting the most benefit from the **LifeBook**:

- *Pray as you read.* Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal truth to you and help you put into practice the truths you learn.
- *Study the **LifeBook** along with an open Bible.* Passages from the Bible are not printed in the **LifeBook**. Only the verse references are given. There is a reason for this. Looking up the passages in your Bible will help you become more familiar with these powerful truths in God's Word.
- *Study one session each week.* Reading the same lesson daily for a week will help you lodge the key truth and main ideas in your mind and your spirit.
- *Memorize the Bible verse at the end of each lesson.* One of your greatest tools as a minister is your knowledge of Scripture. The Holy Spirit will use the Word of God you have hidden in your heart.

- *Meditate on the key truth in each lesson.* These truths can change your life. Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to you by putting these life-giving concepts deep in your spirit.
- *Make a plan to act on what you learn.* The “Your Response” section at the end of each lesson is your opportunity to turn life-giving truth into life-changing actions! Determine that you will act on what you learn.
- *The lesson in Week 1 may be used to share the gospel with others.* Carry the **LifeBook** with you wherever you go. You can use the Week 1 lesson as a tool for evangelism. You can witness for Christ and lead people to faith in Him simply by reading the Week 1 lesson with them and giving them an opportunity to respond.

May God bless you as you grow in your walk with Christ and in your service for Him. Jesus said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:8). It is my prayer that God will use the **LifeBook** to help you bear much fruit.

David Shibley
President, Global Advance

The Good News We Preach

The most important and most thrilling discovery in life is finding the way home to God. There are signposts that point us home to Him.



Love — God's Heart Toward You

As the Creator of everything, God is perfect and holy. His heart of infinite love reaches out to embrace you. He desires to cleanse you of your sins. He longs to give you peace of mind and heart, purpose for living and assurance of a home in heaven with Him.

The Bible says . . .

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

The thief [the devil] does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10).

**For God so loved
the world that He
gave His only begot-
ten Son, that whoever
believes in Him should
not perish but have
everlasting life.**

John 3:16



Forgiveness and Fellowship — Your Need for God

The most desperate need of people everywhere is to be forgiven by God and restored to fellowship with Him. The mad pursuit after pleasure and possessions is often an unconscious search for God. Although we were created to enjoy His presence, humanity's rebellion against God's rulership has cut our communion with

Him. This rebellion is the root of all sin and has resulted in all the sadness in our world. All of our self-efforts to reach God have proved inadequate.

The Bible says . . .

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear (Isaiah 59:2).

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

**For there is one God and
one Mediator between
God and men, the Man
Christ Jesus.**

1 Timothy 2:5



Jesus Christ — God's Provision for You

Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. As the eternal Son of God He lived a perfect, sinless life. His death is the sacrifice God accepts to pay for all your sins. Three days after He died on the cross, He physically rose from the grave, forever triumphing over sin, death and hell. As God's only provision for sin, He offers forgiveness and new life to you, right now. You can experience the way home to God. You can become a member of His family now.

The Bible says . . .

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).



Repentance and Faith—Your Commitment to Christ

What does it mean to commit yourself to Christ? First, it means repenting or turning away from your old way of living. In turning to Christ you must turn from all your sins and from all your human efforts to save yourself. This commitment means trusting fully in Jesus' death for you as the only payment ever needed for your sins. Since He purchased you with His own blood, it also means transferring ownership of your life to Jesus Christ. The time to make this commitment to Christ is *now*.

The Bible says . . .

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation . . . For “whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:9, 10, 13).

Make this the prayer of your heart:

Lord Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross for me. Right now I repent of my sins and trust Your shed blood as full payment for all my sins. I believe You are the Son of God and that God has raised You from the dead. I now receive You as my personal Savior and commit my life without reservation to You as Lord. Thank You for hearing my prayer, forgiving my sins, and coming into my life as You promised. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer in sincerity and faith, welcome to the family of God! Jesus Christ has promised to come into your life when, in repentance and faith, you invite Him to be your Lord. The Bible says, *“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11, 12).*

Notes

*Love—God's Heart Toward You**Forgiveness and Fellowship—
Your Need for God**Jesus Christ—God's Provision for You**Repentance and Faith—
Your Commitment to Christ***MEMORIZE:**

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).

KEY TRUTH:

By His death on the cross, Jesus has opened the way to salvation and eternal life for every person who repents of sin and receives Him by faith as Lord and Savior.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Have you made a personal commitment of your life to Christ?
- What will you do *this week* to share the gospel with someone else?
- How can God use your life to bring this good news to the largest number of people?

Note: This message is available as a gospel tract from the American Tract Society, P.O. Box 462008, Garland, Texas 75046 USA or www.gospelcom.net/ats.

How to Know You Are God's Child

Read: John 1:12; Romans 10:9, 10

We enter into a relationship with God by repenting of our sins and receiving God's gift of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. By faith, we receive His sacrifice on the cross as the full payment for our sins. The Bible refers to this new condition as being *in Christ*. (Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.)

Now, through faith in Christ we are *saved* from the terrible day when God will judge the unbeliever for his sin and unbelief. (Read Romans 10:9, 10; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9.)

We have been *redeemed* by the blood of Christ—redeemed from the control of Satan and sin. Now we belong to Jesus. He has paid the price for us. (Read 1 Peter 1:18, 19.)

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, we are *converted*. That means we are changed by His life and power in us. (Read Matthew 18:3.)

Now you can live in full assurance that you have been forgiven and are a member of God's family. It is very important for your church congregation to live in this assurance, as well. Many people struggle with doubts regarding their salvation. Here are some ways to help the people to whom you minister live with assurance that they belong to God.

**In hope of eternal life
which God, who cannot
lie, promised before
time began.**

Titus 1:2

1. Be sure you have fully repented from your sin, received Jesus Christ as your Savior and made Him Lord over your life. In other words, be sure the person has been genuinely converted. This means he or she must turn from their sins. They must also renounce any attempt to be saved by their own good actions and

rely completely on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as the only payment for sin God accepts.

2. Assurance of salvation is in the fact that Jesus Christ lives inside of you. Jesus has promised to come and live in the life of anyone who will receive Him. (Read Revelation 3:20; John 6:37; 1 John 5:11, 12.)

3. Realize that salvation is not your accomplishment but God's accomplishment. It is God who does the saving. Salvation is not something you do, it is something God has done for you! As an old hymn says, "Jesus paid it all/All to Him I owe."

4. Trust God's promises to you. Because of your faith in Christ, you now have "*eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began*" (Titus 1:2). (Read the wonderful promises of salvation Jesus has given you in John 5:24; John 10:9; John 10:28, 29.) Put your confidence in God who cannot lie and His Word which endures forever.

5. Don't rely on your feelings. Your hope of salvation cannot rest on how you feel at any given moment. Rather, your hope of eternal life must be squarely planted in an historical fact—Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for you and rose again! As a new creation in Christ, you have literally become a new person. Your sins have been forgiven and will not be held against you in judgment. (Read Colossians 2:13.) You are changing daily because the Holy Spirit now lives inside of you. You now have the very nature of Christ. (Read Romans 3:22.)

In Christ you have both abundant life and eternal life. Eternal life means you will live forever with the Lord in heaven. But to have eternal life also means that you have the very life of God inside of you. The God of the universe has staked His claim on you and He will continue His loving, transforming work in you until His work in you is complete! (Read Philippians 1:6.)

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

Notes**MEMORIZE:**

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

KEY TRUTH:

When we repent of our sins and put our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ for us on the cross, God forgives our sins and welcomes us into His family. We are made new; literally born again!

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Do you have personal assurance of salvation?
- On what basis are you placing your hope of salvation?
- Prepare a lesson to share these truths with others.

First Steps

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15

Deitrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” The Apostle Paul said, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20).

This is the essence of Christian discipleship—following Jesus Christ in a total surrender of life to Him. In this adventure of following Jesus Christ, there are clear first steps every believer in Christ should take.

1. Publicly confess your faith in Christ. Major decisions in life are almost always announced publicly. Whenever Jesus called someone to follow Him, He always called that person publicly. By declaring your allegiance to Jesus, you announce to the world that you are not ashamed to acknowledge Him as Lord of your life. This public confession helps seal your commitment. (Read Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9, 10.)

2. Follow Christ in water baptism. Your baptism is a public statement of your faith. You are declaring that you have died to the old way of life and have risen to walk in newness of life in Christ. Your baptism is also a wonderful opportunity to share your faith in Jesus Christ with your family and friends. (Read Romans 6:4.)

3. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill and control you. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter Jesus promised to bring to His followers. The Holy Spirit lives inside us as Christians, giving us the power to act, think and speak in ways that please God. The Spirit’s fruit, gifts and power are available to you. (Read Ephesians 5:18.)

**Therefore whoever
confesses Me before
men, him I will also
confess before My
Father who is in heaven.**

Matthew 10:32

4. Turn from every known sin. We can live holy lives by the power of God's Spirit who lives in us. Immediately, whenever God reveals to us any words, attitudes or actions that dishonor Him, we should acknowledge our sin and fully repent. As we walk in His light, our fellowship with Jesus stays strong and we grow ever closer to Him. (Read 1 John 1:7–9.)

5. Unite with a Christ-centered local church. Fellowship with other believers is vital for your Christian growth. We are strengthened by fellowship and worship together, and we also strengthen others. Faithful involvement with a Christ-honoring church will allow you the privilege of serving and giving to Christ and His people. (Read Hebrews 10:24, 25.)

6. Serve Christ by serving people. As followers of Jesus, we are to serve others. Instead of focusing on your own needs, let your focus be on the Lord and on people you can minister to in His name. By giving yourself for God and for others, you will bring honor to Jesus Christ. (Read Mark 10:44, 45.)

7. Open up to God through the Bible. Don't let a day go by without reading, studying and meditating on God's Word, the Bible. The Bible is God's love letter to you. Through its pages God speaks to you—guiding, warning, correcting and expressing His love. Look around you. Everything you see is wearing away—except the Word of God. God's Word endures forever. (Read Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 119:105.)

8. Develop your prayer life. There is no higher privilege on earth than communion with God. Because of the blood of Jesus, we have direct access to God anytime, anywhere. You can begin today by using the model prayer Jesus taught in Matthew 6:9–13. As you pray, believe God for answers. You can be a world-changer through prayer! (Read Mark 11:24; Hebrews 10:19–23.)

9. Introduce others to Jesus. What an honor it is to represent Jesus Christ! Millions of people all over the world are hungry to know God. They are ready to receive Christ—if only someone will point the way to Him. Be sensitive today to opportunities to share your love for Christ and your faith in Him. There is great joy in introducing someone else to Jesus. (Read Acts 1:8.)

10. Trust God's promises. God is pleased when we live by faith, trusting what He has said. God has given us the promise of His presence. (Read Hebrews 13:5.) He has given the promise of His purpose. (Read Romans 8:28, 29.) He has given the promise of His provision. (Read Philippians 4:19.) He has given the promise of His power. (Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.) Be a person of faith and trust God's promises to you. (Read 2 Corinthians 5:7.)

Notes

MEMORIZE:

But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen (2 Peter 3:18).

KEY TRUTH:

Discipleship is the life-long adventure of living under the lordship of Jesus Christ and the control of the Holy Spirit and influencing others to follow Jesus.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Have you taken these ten basic steps in your walk with Christ?
- Are you training a small group of men, just as Paul trained Timothy? Who is your “Timothy”?
- Make an action plan to share these steps with others.

Note: An expansion of this outline is found in David Shibley’s book, *Now That You Are His*. For cost details you may contact Global Advance at their web site, www.globaladvance.org.

Amazing Grace

Read: John 1:14–17

Two truths set Christianity apart from all other world religions: the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the grace of God. In most other major religions, man attempts to make himself acceptable to God or to some deity. In Christianity, God gives His own righteousness to us by faith. This is what the Bible calls imputed righteousness. (Read Romans 4:19–25.)

Man-made religions begin with their own sets of *do's* and *don'ts*, but Christianity begins with *done!* On the cross Jesus cried, “*It is finished!*” (*John 19:30*). The price for your salvation has been paid in full.

Grace goes beyond mercy. God’s grace is His undeserved favor toward us. God’s grace is His enablement to live a life that pleases Him. We receive God’s grace by faith, and even our faith is His gift to us.

There are several actions of grace mentioned in the Bible. These include the following:

1. **Saving grace.** Charles Spurgeon was right when he observed, “Man contributes the sum total of nothing to his own salvation.” It is God who saves us by His grace. This means that God, because of His great love for you, saves you when you put your trust in Christ, even though you do not merit or deserve His favor. When we trust the finished work of Jesus Christ in paying for our sins on the cross, God imputes His righteousness to us by faith. (Read Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5.)
2. **Securing grace.** Our relationship with God is secure because of His grace. What more could be added to the payment that has already been made for your sins—the shed blood of Jesus Christ? You must be persuaded as Paul was that

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:5

Jesus is perfectly able to protect and keep what He has purchased with His own blood. (Read 2 Timothy 1:12.) The payment for our sin has already been fully paid for by the blood of Jesus which He shed for us. (Read Romans 5:1, 2.)

3. Sanctifying grace. (Read Titus 2:11–14.) Notice the effect of God’s grace in our lives. God’s grace teaches us 1) to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly lusts, 2) to say “yes” to godliness, and 3) to live expectantly, in the hope of Jesus’ return.

4. Serving grace. (Read 2 Corinthians 8:9; Ephesians 3:1, 2.) God’s grace enables us to serve others in the name of Jesus Christ.

5. Surprising grace. God delights in blessing us as His children. He literally heaps grace on top of grace. He surprises us with unexpected blessings and empowers us in every situation to bring honor to Him. (Read John 1:16.)

6. Strengthening grace. In the fourth chapter of Acts, the church was experiencing persecution for the first time. Their response was to pray, asking God for His strength and for dramatic demonstrations that would prove that Jesus is alive. God answered their prayer, bringing them great power and great grace. (Read Acts. 4:33.)

7. Sufficient grace. Paul understood his own weaknesses. But he turned his weakness into a triumph for Christ, exchanging all that he was not for all that Jesus is! No matter how difficult your situation may be, God’s grace is sufficient for you. (Read 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10.)

Receive this pronouncement from God’s Word today: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen”* (2 Corinthians 13:14).

**The grace of the Lord
Jesus Christ, and the
love of God, and the
communion of the
Holy Spirit be with
you all. Amen.**

2 Corinthians 13:14

Notes

MEMORIZE:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8–10).

KEY TRUTH:

Grace is God's unmerited favor toward us and the enablement of Jesus Christ within us.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Are you trusting in your own good works for salvation, or are you trusting completely in the finished work of Jesus Christ for you on the cross?
- Is there an area where you feel weak or inadequate? Read again 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10 and draw upon the grace of God.
- Prepare a message on the grace of God and share these truths with others.

Five Faith Declarations

Read: Jeremiah 1:4–19

When God calls a person for His service, He also enables him for ministry. You may feel unqualified for the task, just as Jeremiah did. Once God called Jeremiah, He would not allow him to make excuses. God rebuked Jeremiah for saying he was not able to fulfill the call. Then God told Jeremiah to never again say he could not do what God had called him to do.

Like Jeremiah, you are called to bring God's message to your generation. He will equip you for the task. From Jeremiah's call to ministry, five faith declarations emerge. Each faith statement is packed with confidence in God's ability in you. *Your availability is exchanged for His ability!* Now you can say, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* (Phil. 4:13). Boldly declare each of the following statements. Say them out loud until you believe them, deep inside. Then step out in faith to impact your generation for Christ.

FAITH DECLARATION ONE: "I am important to the kingdom of God. Therefore, I will act like an ambassador." *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations"* (Jeremiah 1:5). Before you were born, God knew you and set you apart for His calling. You should walk in the dignity of your calling as an ambassador for Christ. (Read 2 Corinthians 5:20; Philippians 1:17.)

FAITH DECLARATION TWO: "God's Word is in my mouth. Therefore, I will speak as an oracle of God." *"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth"* (Jeremiah 1:9). You should preach with authority, knowing that God is delivering His message through you. Give to the people the message God has given you. When you preach God's Word, expect Him to act! (Read 1 Peter 4:11.)

**I can do all things
through Christ who
strengthens me.
Philippians 4:13**

FAITH DECLARATION THREE: “The work of God is my work. Therefore, I will be a diligent worker.” God sent the young prophet “to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10). In other words, God put Jeremiah to work. You are involved in the most important work in the world. So, why should any farmer work harder in *his* field than you work in *your* spiritual field? Why should any student study more diligently than you? Why should any businessman show more enthusiasm for building his business than you show for building the kingdom of God?

Jesus was never in a hurry, but He was never late either. He didn't waste a moment. A famous pastor was once asked the secret of the success of his ministry. He replied, “Love God, love people, pray much and work hard.” Jesus was urgent and diligent. We should be, as well. (Read Psalm 90:12; John 9:4; Ephesians 5:16.)

FAITH DECLARATION FOUR: “Revelation is my qualification. Therefore, I will pray.” God asked Jeremiah, “What do you see?” (Jeremiah 1:11). What is your vision—your revelation? Revelation is God's truth that He wants to reveal to you. Education is important. *Revelation* is even more important. (Read Luke 18:1.) Revelation comes to us when we are in His presence.

FAITH DECLARATION FIVE: “I must sow in order to reap. Therefore, I will sow in faith.” Now it is time for you to “*arise and speak*” (Jeremiah 1:17). A farmer must sow his seed before there is a harvest, and you must sow the seed of God's Word in faith to reap your harvest. God's order is: sow, then reap. Give, then receive. (Read Luke 6:38; Galatians 6:9; Acts 20:35.)

Notes

MEMORIZE:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5).

KEY TRUTH:

You have been called by God as His messenger to bring His Word to your nation and other nations. God set you apart in this calling before you were born.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Speak these declarations out loud every day this week.
- Prepare and share a message on the call of God to Jeremiah and God's call to His messengers in our day.

Ensuring a Fruitful, Life-long Ministry

Read: Psalm 78:72; 2 Peter 1:2 – 11

If I could pray one prayer for you as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I would pray that God would give you a fruitful, Christ-honoring ministry all your life. The Bible describes qualities we can cultivate that will ensure an effective, productive life in service for Christ. Also, growing in these qualities assures us that we will never fall away from our love for Jesus. God has given us *“all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue”* (2 Peter 1:3). Rely on the Holy Spirit to change you and cooperate with Him by cultivating these character qualities each day.

1. Faith. *“Add to your faith . . .”* (2 Peter 1:5). Faith is the bedrock of character because faith is simply believing God and His promises. Do not allow your mind to develop thought patterns of unbelief.

2. Virtue (or goodness). *“Add to your faith virtue . . .”* (2 Peter 1:5). The meaning of the word virtue is moral excellence. Ministers of the gospel should be above reproach and not fall victim to the abuse of money, sex or power. (Read the qualifications for a spiritual overseer in 1 Timothy 3:2–7.) Deal ruthlessly with every sin and cultivate a whole-hearted devotion to Jesus. A person of integrity is a whole person; there is no difference between what he appears to be in public and who he really is in private.

3. Knowledge. *“Add . . . to virtue knowledge”* (2 Peter 1:5). Jesus said we are to love God with all our mind. (Read Matthew 22:37.) God wants you to keep growing—body, mind and spirit. Continue to read, keep

**His divine power
has given to us all
things that pertain to
life and godliness,
through the knowledge
of Him who called us by
glory and virtue.**

2 Peter 1:3

asking questions, and thirst for knowledge and wisdom. (Read Colossians 2:2, 3.)

4. Self-control. *“To knowledge self-control”* (2 Peter 1:6). Many people today are overcome with rage and anger. Anger that is out of control is never acceptable for a minister of the gospel. (Read 2 Timothy 2:24.) By the power of the Holy Spirit we can keep our emotions and actions under control and not take part in destructive thinking or destructive actions. Also, our legitimate desires are to be brought under the Spirit’s control. True meekness, as perfectly displayed by Jesus, is strength under control.

5. Perseverance. *“To self control perseverance”* (2 Peter 1:6). It is always too soon to be discouraged. Someone is reading these words who is very disheartened in ministry. The word of the Lord comes to you today: *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (Galatians 6:9). No matter how difficult your circumstances, never, never, never lose your faith! To win the race, you must stay in the race! (Read Hebrews 12:1–7.)

6. Godliness. *“To perseverance godliness”* (2 Peter 1:6). Godliness is not self-righteousness or legalism. In fact, it is the very opposite. Godliness means cultivating God’s life in us, drawing upon the power of His Spirit. You can experience the “exchanged life”—exchanging all that you are not for all that Jesus Christ is. As you yield to Him, you are literally being conformed into the likeness of Christ. (Read Romans 8:28, 29.)

7. Brotherly kindness. *“To godliness brotherly kindness”* (2 Peter 1:7). God calls on us to exhibit a quality that people are starved to receive—kindness. Your compassionate touch, your word or note of encouragement, the prayers you offer for someone in need—in God’s eyes these simple acts may be the most important things you do today. In a world where most people are self-seeking, your kindness will really stand out and be a great testimony for Jesus Christ.

8. Love. *“And to brotherly kindness love”* (2 Peter 1:7). Love should be the compelling force behind all ministry. (Read

**... the love of God has
been poured out in our
hearts by the Holy Spirit
who was given to us.**

Romans 5:5

Notes

2 Corinthians 5:14, 15; Galatians 5:6.) Love is the greatest of all the Christian virtues. The love of Christ is part of the fruit of the Spirit that God will develop in us as we trust Him. “. . . the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). (Read Galatians 5:22, 23.)

MEMORIZE:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24).

KEY TRUTH:

All effective Christian leaders must constantly be developing their character. God has given us all we need for life and godliness through an ever-growing relationship with Jesus Christ. (Read 2 Peter 1:3, 4.)

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Right now, stop for a moment and commit to cultivating these eight character qualities in your life. Yield to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to produce His fruit in you.
- Prayerfully study this passage every day this week, asking God to produce and increase these qualities in you.

Approved to God

Read 2 Timothy 2:15

Jim Elliot was a missionary martyr. Along with four other brave missionaries, Elliot laid down his life for Christ in an attempt to get the gospel to the remote Waodoni tribe of Ecuador.

When Jim Elliot was only 20 years old, just before his graduation from college, he remarked that the only “degree” that truly mattered was what he called “the A.U.G. degree”—Approved Unto God.

What “courses” are required to receive this “degree”? Specifically, what must we do to be approved to God in ministry? Here are some “required courses” to receive “the A.U.G. degree.”

1. Prayer. Are you growing in your communion with God? Charles Spurgeon told the young preachers he was training that their greatest asset was their “familiarity with the Mercy Seat.” Jesus taught that we should always maintain an attitude of prayer, and that prayer is a safeguard against discouragement and exhaustion in ministry. (Read Luke 18:1.)

Here is a “crash course” on strengthening your prayer life:

- *Pray with commitment.* The disciples had a set hour they devoted to prayer. We should also have set times for prayer. (Read Acts 3:1.)
- *Pray fervently.* Gordon Lindsay believed that “every Christian should pray at least one violent prayer every day!” (Read James 5:16; Matthew 11:12.)
- *Pray specifically.* (Read Matthew 16:19.)
- *Pray with other believers.* (Read Acts 4:24.)

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.

Luke 18:1

- *Pray persistently, until the answer comes.* (Read Luke 11:9.)
- *Pray boldly.* (Read Hebrews 4:16.)
- *Pray expecting God to answer.* (Read 1 John 5:14, 15.)

2. Compassion. Love is the springboard to all effective ministry. A young minister in the Salvation Army once sent a message to General William Booth, stating that nothing he tried in ministry seemed to work. General Booth sent back a short, strong reply: “Try tears.” (Read Psalm 126:5, 6; Galatians 5:6.)

3. Vision. I have never seen a man enter ministry with a small vision. Tragically, I have seen many men *exit* ministry with a small vision. The devil had taken the hammer of adversity and the chisel of disappointments to whittle away at their hopes and dreams. Suddenly they realized their vision was no longer God-size, it was only man-size. I appeal to you: *Protect the vision God has given you at all costs!* And remember, our vision is to be first of Him, and then a vision of ministry for Him. (Read Proverbs 29:18.)

4. Faith. William Carey, a great missionary to India, said, “Attempt great things for God. Expect great things from God.” All Christian leaders possess great faith. Faith is like a muscle: If you exercise your faith, it will grow. If you do not stretch your faith, it will atrophy and grow weak. (Read Hebrews 11:6.)

5. Humility. A godly Christian scholar once said, “If you know Hebrew, Latin and Greek, do not be like Jesus’ executioners and place it at His head. Rather, take your knowledge of Hebrew, Latin and Greek and place it at His feet.” A daily, intentional humbling of ourselves before God is vital for the health of our souls. (Read 1 Peter 5:5, 6.)

6. Work. Here is an important truth in ministry: No amount of work will compensate for a lack of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. But it is equally true that no amount of anointing will compensate for a lack of hard work. A well-known Christian writer once told me, “The Holy Spirit does not type.” He provides the inspiration, but to get things done for the Kingdom of God we must provide the perspiration! (Read 2 Corinthians 6:4–10; 12:15.)

Notes

MEMORIZE:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

KEY TRUTH:

We must be diligent each day to present ourselves to God and to give ourselves to those pursuits that will bring His smile and approval.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Have you taken the “required courses” for your “A.U.G. degree”?
- Prepare a message on being approved to God and share these truths with others.

Called and Committed

Read: Colossians 4:17

One of my greatest joys and honors was preaching the ordination sermon for our son, Jonathan. Here is the charge I gave to my own son as a minister of the gospel. It is the challenge I give to you, as well.

1. Keep a clear vision. Frequently “revisit the vision,” keeping it clear and fresh in your heart. Stay faithful to the original call of God for your life and ministry. Remember that your calling is your anointing. God will give you supernatural anointing for what He has called you to do. Stay in your calling and you will stay anointed for ministry; go beyond your calling and you risk going alone. Some 20 years after his dramatic conversion and call by Christ on the Damascus road, Paul was able to testify to a pagan king that he had been fully faithful to God’s call on his life. (Read Acts 26:13–23.)

2. Keep a clean conscience. Here is a promise—it is not a “precious” promise, but it is a promise nonetheless: In ministry someone is going to hurt you. Unkind words will be spoken against you. People will oppose you and what you wish to do for God. Do not allow yourself to become embittered against people. Never respond to an attack against you with an attack of your own. Keep a clean conscience before God and before people. (Read Acts 24:16.)

3. Keep a firm commitment to Scripture. At your lowest points and most difficult times, it is God’s promises that will sustain you. Listen to William Carey’s testimony at a very difficult time in his ministry in India:

“When I left England, my hope of India’s conversion was very strong; but amongst so many obstacles, it would die, unless upheld

And say to Archippus,

**“Take heed to the
ministry which you have
received in the Lord,
that you may fulfill it.”**

Colossians 4:17

by God. I have God, and His Word is true. Though the superstitions of the heathen were a thousand times stronger than they are, and the example of the Europeans a thousand times worse, though I were deserted by all and persecuted by all, yet my faith, fixed on the sure Word, would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial. God's cause will triumph." (Quoted by John Piper, "The Supremacy of God in Missions Through Worship," *Into All the World*, 2001 edition, 8.)

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.
Ephesians 5:18

4. Keep under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Allow God to do what only He can do. Live in what Bob Pierce called "God room." Dr. Pierce defined "God room" as "that space between what is humanly possible and what God wants done that is impossible." (Read Ephesians 3:20, 21; 5:18.)

5. Continue through conflicts. Conflict in ministry is inevitable because you are commissioned to displace the current state of affairs with the Kingdom of God. Stay faithful and God will reward you. (Read 1 Peter 5:1–4.)

What we today refer to as being faithful to your call, earlier generations referred to as "a charge to keep." Charles Wesley wrote a beautiful hymn about fidelity to God's call on our lives:

*A charge I have to keep, a Christ to glorify,
Who gave His Son my soul to save and fit it for the sky.
To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill,
O may it all my powers engage to do my Master's will.
Help me to watch and pray, and on Thyself rely,
Assured, if I my trust betray, I shall my Lord deny.
Arm me with jealous care, as in Thy sight to live,
And O Thy servant, Lord, prepare a strict account to give.*

6. Keep consecrated to the Captain. Before Joshua was given the honor of leading God's army into battle, he had to settle once and for all that God's army has only one captain—and Joshua was not that captain. (Read Joshua 5:13–15.) Never forget who's in charge. It is Christ's church, not yours. The battle is His, not yours. The conquest is His, not yours. The glory

Notes

is His, not yours. Steve Fry wrote this great chorus:

I'm abandoned to the Captain of the mighty hosts of heaven,

And I pledge Him my allegiance 'til the earth becomes His kingdom.

7. Keep a consuming love for Jesus. How do you remain faithful in ministry year after year? How do you keep from becoming a ministry casualty? The best answer I can give you is to *keep freshly falling in love with Jesus every day*. Love Him more by nightfall than you did this morning. And love Him more tomorrow morning than you do when you go to sleep tonight.

Finally,
Stay close to Jesus,
Stay close to your wife,
Stay close to the cross,
Stay close to the Great Commission.

MEMORIZE:

That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us (2 Timothy 1:14).

KEY TRUTH:

We must stay faithful to the call of God on our lives.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Paul was able to clearly describe his call to a pagan king in one sentence. Can you clearly and succinctly describe your call, both to believers and to unbelievers?
- Prepare an ordination message and share these truths with young men in ministry.

Highly Favored

Read: 2 Chronicles 16:9; Luke 1:28–30

Nothing could be more vital for effectiveness in ministry than finding favor with God. While all born again believers live under the general grace of God, there are certain individuals who seem “highly favored” by Him. It is those who are “highly favored” who become God’s instruments for the fulfilling of His purposes in their generation. How can you become a “highly favored” person?

God is constantly scanning the earth, looking for a certain quality of person, one “*whose heart is totally loyal to Him.*” God will go to great lengths for such a loyal-hearted servant, to show Himself strong in behalf of that man or woman. (Read again 2 Chronicles 16:9.)

The Bible says Jesus was born in “*the fullness of time.*” (Read Galatians 4:4.) In Mary’s day as in every generation, God looked for a human instrument through whom He could fulfill His purposes for that generation. When it was time for the Son of God to come into the world, God’s eyes scanned the earth for the human instrument He could lift to become highly favored and through whom He could accomplish His will. He found the right person in a young virgin named Mary.

What was it about Mary that impressed the heart of God? Why was this teenage girl from a small village given history’s greatest assignment? If we can discover what qualities of heart were in Mary that brought her to God’s attention and gave her the title of “highly favored,” we too can become highly favored and be used of God to fulfill His purposes in our day.

It needs to be clearly understood that we are not worshipping Mary. “*God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*” (Acts 10:34, 35). Mary acknowledged her own need of a Savior when she said, “*My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior*” (Luke 1:47). However, we do honor Mary as a great example of one whose heart pleases God.

**A good man
obtains favor
from the Lord.
Proverbs 12:2**

We also may cultivate these same qualities of heart. Then we too will find favor with God and be His instrument to fulfill His purposes for our time.

What qualities of heart did Mary possess that brought her favor with God?

1. A pure heart. (Read Luke 1:27.) Mary was a virgin who was engaged. She was in love with a good man named Joseph. Although she loved Joseph, she loved God more, keeping herself pure before God. (Read Matthew 5:8.) She was committed to be a vessel of honor for God. (Read 2 Timothy 2:21.) Whatever your past may have been, from this day forward you can live with a pure heart before God and receive His favor. (Read Isaiah 1:18.)

2. A daring heart. Mary was willing to risk greatly for God. When the annunciation of the angel came to Mary, she understood the possible consequences. Yet without hesitation she responded, “*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word*” (Luke 1:38). Mary’s core understanding of her true identity was not as Joseph’s fiancé, but as the servant of the Lord. She knew Joseph might not understand. She risked her engagement and her reputation. She was willing to give God what was most precious to her. Are you willing to give God what is most precious to you?

3. A faith-filled heart. Faith was so obvious in Mary’s life that when Elizabeth greeted her, she blessed her for her faith. (Read Luke 1:45.) Not only did Mary have great faith, she had faith to believe for something that had never happened in history. Never had there been a virgin birth, but Mary said yes and believed. God is looking for men and women who will believe for what has never happened. Never in history has the church fulfilled the Great Commission. Once again, God is looking for someone who will say yes and believe.

4. A worshiping heart. Mary’s response to God’s miracle in her life was to fill her heart and her mouth with worship. Her great *Magnificat* is a beautiful hymn of praise and worship to God. (Read Luke 1:46–55.) For the last several years the Holy Spirit has been pressing the church around the world into new dimensions of worship. Let your heart be filled with adoration to God at all times. (Read Psalm 96.)

5. A Word-filled heart. Mary’s great song was actually portions of Scripture she had personalized and woven into a gift of worship to God. Mary’s song included passages she had memorized from Genesis, 1 Samuel, the Psalms and Isaiah. Clearly, Mary was very familiar with all the Scripture that was available to her. God is looking for those who know and obey His Word. (Read Joshua 1:8; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.)

6. A hope-filled heart. Mary was willing to forego honor from her own generation in order to build a spiritual path for generations to come. Although she was

Notes

misunderstood and maligned by people in her day, every succeeding generation has honored her. She looked to the future and knew that future generations would call her blessed. (Read Luke 1:48.) Today as well God is looking for those who will lay aside their reputation in radical obedience to Jesus Christ and build a spiritual heritage for those who will come after them.

7. A surrendered heart. Now let's fast-forward the story thirty years. Jesus was beginning His ministry at the marriage of Cana. When they ran out of wine Mary preached the greatest sermon ever. Her audience was a group of servants and her message was only one sentence, "*Whatever He says to you, do it*" (John 2:5).

MEMORIZE:

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

KEY TRUTH:

God is scanning the earth today, looking for the person He can lift to highly favored status and use as His instrument to fulfill His purposes in this generation. The person God is looking for must have a heart that is totally loyal to Him and have qualities of heart like Mary.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Are you cultivating these qualities of heart?
- What has God specifically told you to do? "*Whatever He says to you, do it*" (John 2:5).

After God's Own Heart

Read: 1 Samuel 13:14

David was a flawed leader yet he became Israel's greatest king. Most importantly, even though horrible sins marred his life, he is remembered as a "man after God's own heart." How does a man with such shortcomings receive such a treasured title?

Much of the answer lies in the high value David gave to his relationship with God. After Nathan exposed his sin, David immediately acknowledged his transgression. His greatest fear was losing the intimacy with God he had enjoyed since his youth. (Read Psalm 51:11.) David realized that, although he had sinned against his marriage, his family, his friend and his nation, ultimately he had sinned against God. (Read Psalm 51:4.)

David longed to walk once again with God in unbroken fellowship. He remembered his days as a shepherd when he composed love songs to God. Herein lies a key to David's greatness. His life was marked by offerings to God. Many of the Psalms are the record of David's sweet communion with His heavenly Father. As David tended his earthly father's sheep, he prepared his heart for leadership by cultivating a heart of gratitude and worship. *"He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds . . . to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands"* (Psalm 78:70–72).

**Nor will I offer . . .
offerings to the Lord my
God with that which costs
me nothing.**

2 Samuel 24:24

1. David's offerings were given with a humble heart. (Read Psalm 51:17.) We should constantly keep in mind our absolute dependence on God. Jesus reminded His disciples, *"Without Me, you can do nothing"* (John 15:5). Without the enabling power of Christ in us by His

Spirit, we can accomplish nothing of eternal value. Brokenness before the Lord yields great authority in ministry. We should ask the Lord for a tender heart that is heart-broken over our own sins and the rebellion of the world against God.

2. David's offerings were costly. For instance, when David's mighty men brought him water from Bethlehem's wells at the risk of their lives, instead of consuming the costly water on himself, he poured it out as an offering to the Lord. (Read 1 Chronicles 11:15–19; 2 Samuel 23:15–17.) The water was rare and valuable, a gift from behind enemy lines. No doubt David badly needed the water for his own sustenance. Also, as a gift of love from his devoted men, he had every right to consume it himself. But this is where we see the beauty of David's heart. That which he had every right to take for himself, that which he needed, that which was precious to him—he chose to pour out as an offering to the Lord. David did not give worthless offerings; he gave to God that which was truly precious and personally costly to him.

This is powerfully illustrated again in 2 Samuel 24. David had sinned by numbering the people, in direct disobedience to God's command. God wanted Israel to trust only in Him, not in their numerical strength. As a result of David's rebellious census, judgment came upon Israel.

As always, when David was confronted with his sin, he repented. Now he prepared to make a sin offering to the Lord, and he desired to purchase Araunah's field as a place to build an altar. As a loyal subject, Araunah offered to give the king his property at no cost. David's response is classic: *"No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer . . . offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing"* (2 Samuel 24:24).

David had many stains on his record yet he is remembered as a man after God's own heart. (Read Acts 13:22.) At least part of the reason why he received this high title was his deep commitment to give God sacrificial offerings that were personally costly to him. As a minister of the gospel, your calling is even higher than David's position as king. You did not "choose" to become preacher of the gospel, as one might choose to be a

**And when He had removed
him, He raised up for them
David as king, to whom
also He gave testimony
and said, "I have found
David the son of Jesse,
a man after My own
heart, who will do
all My will."**

Acts 13:22

lawyer or an engineer. If you are truly God's minister, you didn't "choose" to be; you were chosen. This honor requires that you respond with love, obedience and sacrifice.

What is the quality of your offerings to God? Are you giving to God that which costs you something? The difference between mediocrity and lasting success will be determined by the quality of your offerings to God. An average preacher is often lazy in his preparation; an effective preacher diligently prepares his soul in prayer and his messages in study. *"But in all these things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, knowledge, longsuffering, kindness, the Holy Spirit and sincere love"* (2 Corinthians 6:4–6).

The very highest offering we could ever give is to present redeemed people to Him. Paul longed to present nations to Christ, those who had been defiant against God but were now redeemed by the power of the gospel. He saw the "offering of the [nations]" as an acceptable offering to God. (Read Romans 15:16.) Evangelism is not just a task, it is also an act of worship.

What an honor it would be to have God refer to you as a person after His own heart. But such an assessment of your life comes at a cost, a high personal cost. As one chosen for the high honor of being a minister of the gospel, I challenge you not to give to God inferior offerings. Pour out your costliest gifts before Him, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

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MEMORIZE:

Nor will I offer . . . offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing (2 Samuel 24:24).

KEY TRUTH:

To become a person after God's own heart, we must adopt a lifestyle of gladly giving to God that which is personally costly for us as an act of worship.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Are you committed to being a person after God's own heart?
- What precious thing will you "pour out before the Lord" as an offering?

A Separated Life

Read: Jeremiah 15:19; Romans 1:1; Galatians 2:20

A noted preacher had just preached a powerful sermon to thousands of people with many responding to his call to Christ. A young Bible school student approached the great preacher after the service and said to him, “Sir, I would give the world to be able to preach like that!” The older preacher looked at him and replied, “Son, that is exactly what it cost me.”

Are you willing to fast while others feast? Are you willing to get up earlier, stay up later, pray longer, work harder—in order that God may receive glory from your life and ministry? Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote,

*The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Toiled upward through the night.*

- 1. A separated life begins with being separated from sin and to God and His will.** Whenever the Holy Spirit reveals any thought, word or action that dishonors the Lord, we should immediately confess it as sin and fully repent. (Read 1 John 1:9.) Based on this important verse, Bill Bright taught a very useful exercise he called “spiritual breathing.” We exhale by confessing our sin. The word confess in the original Greek means *to agree with* or *to say the same thing*. When we say the same thing about our sin that God says about it, fully agreeing with Him that it has no place in our lives as believers and turning from that sin, then God promises a full cleansing. We then inhale by receiving God’s promise of forgiveness and asking Him to freshly fill us with His Holy Spirit.

**If we confess our sins,
He is faithful and just
to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all
unrighteousness.**

1 John 1:9

In this way, we can maintain unbroken fellowship with the Lord. I have practiced “spiritual breathing” for many years, often many times in a single day, as the Holy Spirit would convict me of any sin in my life.

2. We must be vigilant to live in an atmosphere of personal revival. No matter what the spiritual climate may be around you, your own soul can always be white hot for God! But there are conditions we must meet if we are to experience personal revival.

One hundred years ago in the great revival in Wales, Evan Robert laid down four conditions for revival. These conditions still apply today:

- Every sinful thing must be put away.
- Every doubtful indulgence must be sacrificed for the sake of holiness.
- Prompt obedience to the voice of the Holy Spirit.
- Public confession of Christ before all men.

3. Personal accountability with a trusted peer in ministry is an important tool in living a godly life. For several years now I have met twice a month with a trusted friend in ministry. Each time we meet, we ask hard questions of each other, holding each other accountable in our walk with Christ. These questions are based on a message on accountability by Charles Swindoll.

Since we last met . . .

- Have you had a daily personal time with the Lord?
- Have you been involved in any questionable financial dealings?
- Have you been with a woman in an inappropriate way or what others might perceive as inappropriate?
- Have you sought out any explicit or pornographic material?
- Would you describe the health of your marriage as better or worse?
- Have you been faithful to your calling as a minister of the gospel?
- Have you just lied?

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.
Colossians 3:17

I encourage you to find a trusted accountability partner or form a small accountability group for mutual encouragement and exhortation.

4. The most important habit you can cultivate is the discipline of a daily personal time with God. Stephen Olford reminds us, “This is not a question of legalism, it’s a question of loyalty.” Dr. Olford suggests that in our time with the Lord in prayer and His Word, we give ourselves to these daily disciplines of devotion:

- My mind dominated by the Word of God. (Read Colossians 3:16.)
- My heart activated by the Spirit of God. (Read Ephesians 5:18.)
- My will motivated by the glory of God. (Read Colossians 3:17.)

I challenge you to make a commitment today to a separated life—separated to Jesus, separated to the gospel, separated to your family and separated to your calling. In the December 27 reading of Oswald Chambers’ devotional classic, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Chambers observes, “Every now and again . . . God brings us to a point of climax. That is the Great Divide in the life; from that point we either go towards a more and more dilatory and useless type of Christian life, or we become more and more ablaze for the glory of God—My Utmost for *His Highest*.”

Notes

MEMORIZE:

I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

KEY TRUTH:

We are to separate ourselves from sin and to God and His will.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Have you confessed all known sin in your life to God?
- Do you have an accountability partner?
- Will you commit yourself to a separated life?

The Soul's Safeguard

**Read: Proverbs 22:4; Micah 6:8;
Acts 20:18 – 21; 1 Peter 5:5, 6**

Missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, was once introduced as “our illustrious guest.” Taylor stepped to the pulpit and replied, “Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master.”

Andrew Murray was a noted Bible teacher. Many of his books are still available and each is a wealth of spiritual nourishment. In his small book, *Humility*, Murray writes that “humility is the mother virtue and the perpetual safeguard of the soul.” Murray believed humility to be the one virtue from which all other virtues are birthed. He also believed that the greatest protection for our souls is humility of heart.

While accountability to others is important, the greatest safeguard of the soul is to daily, voluntarily humble ourselves before the Lord. We must be broken before the Lord, acknowledging our deep need and total dependence on Him. Brokenness before the Lord is not just an asset in ministry, it is a necessity. (Read Psalm 51:17.)

1. Daily humble your heart before God. To our shame, very few people seem to be able to carry both anointing and humility. But God's Word warns that pride precedes spiritual disaster. This principle is always true: The way up in spiritual things is down. (Read Proverbs 16:18.) Jesus promises a wonderful reward for those who humble themselves before the Lord: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:3). To be poor in spirit means we recognize our total dependence upon God.

Notice that we are never to pray that God will humble us. This could be very dangerous. Rather, we are to take

**The sacrifices of God
are a broken spirit, a
broken and a contrite
heart — these, O God,
You will not despise.**

Psalm 51:17

the initiative and humble ourselves.
(Read James 4:6, 10.)

2. Develop a “private history” with God.

I promise you: Somewhere in your future, Goliath awaits you. There is a “giant” in your future that you must confront. This “giant” of opposition is determined to destroy you, and to destroy you in public. What confidence will you have in that day of open confrontation that you will be the victor?

Young David told King Saul why he knew he would defeat Goliath: “*The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine*” (1 Samuel 17:37.) This was not youthful pride; it was a deep inner assurance that had been birthed in private victories. David had a private history with God that gave him confidence in the day of his greatest public test. If you slay the lion of lust and the bear of unbelief when no one is watching, you too will have confidence when you publicly face your coming Goliath.

3. Know who you are in Jesus Christ. There is a great difference between ungodly arrogance and the confidence a person has who knows who he is in Christ. Much of the arrogance we see among ministers is masking great inner insecurities. Part of the reason for this poor self image is failing to understand the inherent dignity we possess as believers in Jesus Christ. We are the righteousness of God in Christ. Because we are in Christ, we are children of God. Because we are in Christ, we are ambassadors for Him. (Read 2 Corinthians 5:17–21; Ephesians 4:1–3; Philippians 1:11.) We should be clothed with humility yet walk in the dignity of who we are in Christ. In other words, we should be like Jesus. We should humble ourselves, just as He did. (Read Philippians 2:5–11.)

4. Kingdom possibilities open to those with humble hearts. Jesus taught that the meek shall inherit the earth. (Read Matthew 5:5.) Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is strength under control. A meek person realizes that he has no power in himself, but that he has all power in God. Let this be your prayer: “*For we have no power against this great multitude that is*

**The Lord, who delivered
me from the paw of the
lion and from the paw of
the bear, He will deliver
me from the hand
of this Philistine.**

1 Samuel 17:37

Notes

coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” (2 Chronicles 20:12). As Phillips Brooks said, “Never allow yourself to feel equal to your work.”

If we are arrogant and proud, God Himself will resist us. But if we humble ourselves before Him, we will have confidence before men and He will exalt us at the right time. If we are to be leaders after God’s own heart, we must always remember that “*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*” Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter. 5:5, 6).

MEMORIZE:

Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time (1 Peter 5:5, 6).

KEY TRUTH:

Know who your are in Christ, daily humble yourself before God and rest in the confidence that He will exalt you in due time.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Meditate on the difference between arrogance and the confidence of knowing who you are in Jesus Christ.
- Humble yourself daily before the Lord.
- Seek by God’s grace to walk in humility.

Minister Here First!

Read: Ephesians 5:22 – 6:4

God does not call us to win the world and in the process lose our families. Yet there is a tragic epidemic of unhappy marriages, rebellious children and divorce among Christian ministers today. It is vital to minister first to our families and then to others.

Our priorities should be: 1) our relationship with God, 2) our relationship with our spouse and children, and 3) the ministry God has given us. The demands of life often pressure us to reverse the order but when we put ministry above our relationship with God and our families the results are always tragic.

1. God calls husbands to be the spiritual leaders of their families. Your family's spiritual health is your responsibility. Husbands are to show the same sacrificial love for their wives that Christ shows for His bride, the Church. (Read Ephesians 5:25.)

2. Other than your relationship with God, your relationship with your spouse is your most important relationship. God requires husbands to love their wives and to commit themselves to the spiritual growth of their wives. (Read Ephesians 5:25–28.)

3. There are steps you can take every day to help your marriage grow. Each day is an opportunity to make your marriage either better or worse. Just as a gardener gives constant attention to his garden, you should continually cultivate your marriage. These four simple practices will go a long way toward strengthening your marriage.

- Every day, pray together.
- Every day, tell your wife you love her.
- Every day, do something to help her.
- Every day, pay her a sincere compliment.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Ephesians 5:25

4. Sexual sins often cause more damage than other sins. The results of immorality in the life of a minister of the gospel are far-reaching and injure the faith of many people. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. (Read 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20.) As Christians we are to control our bodies and live in holiness and honor. (Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8.) Right now, determine that you will live in purity before the Lord. Present your body to the Lord as an instrument through which He can accomplish His will. (Read Romans 12:1, 2.)

5. Jesus taught that unfaithfulness begins in the heart. (Read Matthew 15:19.) The battleground for purity is the mind. You can resist lustful thoughts by replacing them with God-honoring thoughts. You are in control of your thoughts. If you change the way you think, your life will be changed! (Read Philippians 4:8.) Unfaithfulness begins in the heart. Faithfulness is sustained in the heart. Rehearse many times in your heart all the wonderful things about your wife, and thank God for bringing her to you.

6. There are safeguards you can establish to help protect against marital unfaithfulness. You are responsible to build protective walls against a moral failure.

- Establish a daily, personal time with the Lord. Cultivate a private life of prayer, worship and meditating on God's Word.
- Have an accountability relationship with a trusted friend or a small group of men. Meet regularly to hold each other accountable. It is a great gift to have a friend who will look you in the eye and ask the questions suggested in Lesson 11. This kind of accountability is very important to you as a Christian leader.
- Do not allow yourself to be in a potentially compromising situation. Early in his ministry, Billy Graham determined that he would never be in a car or room alone with a woman other than his wife. If you must meet alone with a woman privately for ministry (which is usually not wise), keep the door slightly open and be sure another person is just outside the door.
- Do not become arrogant. Many ministers who have fallen morally had once boasted, "This could never happen to me." Keep a humble heart before the Lord. Be vigilant against temptation. When temptation comes, remember that God has already provided the way of escape. (Read Ephesians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 10:12, 13.)

7. The Holy Spirit will empower you to fulfill your responsibilities as a husband and father. The Bible says that husbands are to "*love their wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*" (Ephesians 5:25). This

quality of sacrificial love is possible only when you are filled with the Holy Spirit and under His control. That is why Paul began his admonition to husbands and wives by first urging them to be filled with the Holy Spirit. (Read Ephesians 5:18–21.)

8. The Bible shows how you can recover a love that has been lost. If your love for your wife has grown cold, there is a way to rekindle your love. Although the church of Ephesus was patient and hard-working, they had left their first love. (Read Revelation 2:2–5.) Here is the prescription Jesus gave them to recover their lost love:

- *Remember.* Make your mind work for your marriage, not against it. Remember your wedding vows. Remember the wonderful times you have experienced together. Remember the beauty of your first love.
- *Repent.* Repent of your cold heart toward your wife. Determine to turn around. The Greek language meaning for “repent” is “to change your mind.” So, change your mind about your marriage. Stop believing the devil’s lies. Renew your mind by God’s Word. Change your mind and turn away from anything that is unhealthy for your marriage.
- *Do the first works.* What did you do when you were first in love? Do those things again. Did you bring her flowers? Did you frequently tell her you loved her? Were you affectionate toward her? Begin today to do the first works.

9. God holds fathers responsible to train their children in the ways of the Lord. (Read Ephesians 6:4.) If you are not a good steward of your family responsibilities, your ministry will be greatly limited. (Read 1 Timothy 3:4, 5; 1 Peter 3:7.)

MEMORIZE:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25).

KEY TRUTH:

God holds you responsible for the health of your marriage and family.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Begin today the four daily practices mentioned in point 3.
- Begin today to establish safeguards against sexual immorality.

Notes

Satan's Schemes

**Read: 2 Corinthians 2:10, 11; Galatians 5:16;
1 John 2:16, 17**

Before Augustine's conversion he led a notorious life of sin. One day in a park he heard some children singing, "Take up and read, take up and read." Looking on the ground Augustine saw a copy of the Bible. The first verse he set his eyes on was Romans 13:14: "*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*" Through that encounter Augustine was gloriously born again and became a great theologian.

In Jesus Christ we have all we need to overcome any attack against us and against God's purpose in our lives. As we stand on God's promises and yield to the new life of Christ within us, we are more than conquerors. (Read 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Romans 8:1–4.)

1. The Bible teaches that we war on three fronts:

- What is translated *the world* in Scripture is usually a reference to the prevailing world system that disregards God. We are not to be distracted by a love of the world. (Read 1 John 2:15.)
- What is translated *the flesh* in Scripture is often a reference to our unredeemed nature; the sin nature outside of Jesus Christ. Biblical writers often refer to the battle between the flesh and the Spirit; the old nature and the new nature. (Read Galatians 5:16–25; Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:8–14.)
- *The devil* and his demon forces are pitted against us. He is not interested in a little sparing match, he wants to totally destroy us. But Jesus Christ has already conquered him through His cross! (Read Luke 22:31, 32; John 10:10; Colossians 1:13, 14; 2:15.)

**Do not love the
world or the things
in the world. If
anyone loves the
world, the love of the
Father is not in him.**

1 John 2:15

2. The schemes of the devil are not new, nor are they many. He simply keeps tripping people up with the same devices he has always used. Among Satan's few, time-tested schemes are:

- *The abuse of money.* I am appalled at the number of ministers who seem unable to see the difference between personal finances and ministry finances. We must be people of the highest integrity in the finances that are entrusted to us. (Read 1 Timothy 3:3; 6:6–11.)
- *The abuse of sex.* The tragic scourge of infidelity among clergy is a worldwide epidemic. We must recommit ourselves to a holy life. (Read Proverbs 5:18–23; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–7.)
- *The abuse of power.* We must be servant-leaders, just as Jesus was. Jesus made it very clear that the leadership style of His disciples would be dramatically different than the world's standards of leadership. (Luke 22:24–26.)
- *Bitterness.* An embittered person cannot be effective for long in ministry. In fact, his bitterness pollutes the spiritual atmosphere around him. (Read Acts 8:22, 23; Hebrews 12:13–15.)
- *Any compulsive behavior.* Some people are addicted to alcohol or drugs. Others are addicted to the praise of men. Still others have sexual addictions. Some are addicted to too much food. A mark of maturity is the willingness to delay gratification. Compulsive behavior can destroy lives, families and ministries.
- *Destructive thought patterns.* Somewhere in many people's childhood, someone began a negative thought cycle by telling them, "You will never achieve anything great." Or, "You cannot do that. You cannot become that kind of leader." God wants us to break free from debilitating thought patterns. (Read Romans 12:1, 2; Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:10.)
- *Poor time management.* This may not seem to be a big sin, like some of the others in this list. Yet poor time management will render you just as ineffective as these other schemes of the devil. (Read Colossians 4:5.)

3. Satan tempted Jesus in the same areas we are tempted. In the wilderness, the devil tempted Jesus with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. (Read Matthew 4:1–11.) Jesus was tempted in every way we are tempted. As our merciful and faithful high priest, He understands and aids us when we are tempted. (Read Hebrews 1:17, 18; 4:15, 16.) In response to each temptation, Jesus told the devil, "It is written." The Son of God defeated Satan by using the Word of God as a weapon. This is how we too can win the battle over temptation.

4. We should put on the whole armor of God. (Read Ephesians 6:10–18.) When we submit to God and resist the enemy, clothed in our spiritual armor, we are guaranteed victory. (Read James 4:7.)

5. Our emphasis should not be on Satan but on Jesus! Instead of a “sin consciousness” we should nurture a “righteousness consciousness.” A fruit tree does not “try” to shed dead leaves. It simply stays healthy and produces fruit. The new fruit naturally pushes off the dead leaves of the past. We are to nourish the new creation life of Christ in us. Yes, we have an adversary, but we are to resist him and keep our focus on the Lord. (Read 2 Corinthians 2:14; 1 Peter 5:8, 9.)

6. At this very moment, Jesus is interceding for us. One of the devil’s titles is the “accuser of the brethren.” But our defense attorney, Jesus Christ, pleads our case! (Read Hebrews 2:14; 7:25; Revelation 12:10.)

MEMORIZE:

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

KEY TRUTH:

God has provided victory for every temptation we face.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- Are you walking in the victory God has provided for you?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to spotlight any sin in your life. Confess that sin, repent of it and trust God for total victory.

Notes

Living for What Matters

Read: Matthew 25:14 – 30; Romans 14:8 – 12; 1 Corinthians 3:11 – 16; 2 Corinthians 5:7 – 10

When I was a child my mother took me to the circus. I remember how awestruck I was watching the lion tamer enter a lions' cage with nothing but a whip and a four-legged chair. How could such flimsy weapons stave off such ferocious animals?

I have since learned that the lion tamer's chair is a formidable weapon. The four legs of the chair distract the beast, impeding his focus. The lion cannot decide which of the four legs he will concentrate on, and this leaves him distracted, without a singular focus and, therefore, harmless.

In the same way many Christians today are simply distracted. Unable to focus on what is supremely important, they become multi-directional, unable to concentrate and, therefore, harmless.

We should focus our lives on what is ultimate—because that is what is ultimately important. Yet everything in our generation seeks to distract us from living with an eternal perspective. We seem to be living for everything except what really matters.

There are three coming events that bring focus to each day of my life. Keeping these future events in mind helps me stay focused and live for what really matters.

1. The Great White Throne Judgment motivates me to *evangelism*. John saw a future time when all the dead would stand before God. Those whose names were not written in the Book of Life were cast into the lake of fire. This should motivate every true Christian to reach others for Jesus Christ. (Read Revelation 20:11–15.)

2. The Judgment Seat of Christ motivates me to *holiness*. Martin Luther commented, “There are only two days that are important to me: today and that day.” Our

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

James 1:12

entire life after conversion will come up for review at the Judgment Seat of Christ. All that we do today should be done in light of that day. Everything you do today matters for eternity. The greatest tragedy in life would be to miss heaven; but the second greatest tragedy would be to go into heaven with no rewards to lay at the feet of Jesus. (Read 1 Corinthians 3:11–15; 2 Corinthians 5:10, 11.)

We must remember that salvation is not a reward; it is the free gift of God given to us when we place our faith in Christ's saving work for us on the cross. But once we are saved, there are rewards we can receive for faithful service to Christ. Why should we desire these rewards? Because heaven says they are valuable, of great worth.

Often the Bible refers to these rewards as crowns. I am not interested in *wearing* crowns when I get to heaven, but I greatly desire to *receive* these crowns! I want something that heaven says is valuable to lay at the feet of Jesus, not in *payment* for salvation but in *worship* and *gratitude* for salvation. There are five crowns we can receive, and there are very clear requirements for winning each crown.

- *The crown of righteousness.* (Read 2 Timothy 4:6–8.) The requirements for this crown are very clear:

Fight the good fight of faith. Someone has remarked that “a good fight is a fight you win!” Our fight is not against people but against the devil and spiritual forces of evil. (Read Ephesians 6:10–18.)

Finish the race. It is always too soon to give up. No matter how difficult your trials may be, stay in the race! You cannot lose if you will not quit.

Keep the faith. Stay committed to the foundational truths of the Christian faith. Do not become a “theological casualty” by departing from the truth of God's Word. (Read Ephesians 4:14, 15; Jude 3.)

Love His appearing. Rejoice in the sure hope of Christ's return. Living in the expectancy of His coming purifies us. (Read 1 John 2:28; 3:2, 3.)

- *The crown of life.* (Read James 1:12; Rev. 2:10.) Sir Walter Raleigh was once commended for laying down his expensive coat for his queen to walk on so she would not have to walk through mud. But Raleigh understood that nothing is ever truly lost that is given up for royalty. The queen rewarded Walter Raleigh for what he laid down, and our King will reward us for what we lay down for Him. The crown of life is sometimes called “the martyrs' crown” because it is given to those who are faithful to Jesus even if it costs them their lives. According to James, it is also given to those who do not give in to temptation. Notice also that James strongly suggests that those who truly love the Lord are those who endure temptation.

- *The imperishable crown.* (Read 1 Corinthians 9:25.) This reward is given to those who discipline their lives in all areas. Paul says that runners train vigorously for a reward that quickly perishes but we discipline our lives for an imperishable crown. He went on to say that he disciplined his body in order that he would not be disqualified for the spiritual race. (Read 1 Corinthians 9:26, 27; Philippians 3:12–14.)
- *The crown of rejoicing.* (Read 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20.) Paul said he would rejoice when he saw the Thessalonian believers, many of whom he had helped to come to Christ, together with him in the Lord's presence. This is sometimes spoken of as "the soulwinner's crown." There is no greater joy than helping to bring someone to faith in Jesus Christ.
- *The crown of glory.* (Read 1 Peter 5:1–4.) The hope of this crown should encourage every faithful pastor and church leader. Your true success will be measured at the Judgment Seat of Christ. To hear Jesus say *well done* will be worth every sacrifice. (Read Matthew 25:14–30.) We cannot even imagine the wonderful rewards God will give to His faithful servants. (Read 1 Corinthians 2:9.)

3. The international gathering around God's throne motivates me to missions. (Read Revelation 5:9; 7:9, 10.) The Great Commission will be fulfilled! Jesus will receive worship from redeemed people from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues. We have the honor of helping move history toward that wonderful day.

MEMORIZE:

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God" (Romans 14:10, 11).

KEY TRUTH:

We should focus our lives on what is ultimate—because that is what is ultimately important.

YOUR RESPONSE:

- What motivates you to evangelism?
- What motivates you to personal holiness?
- What motivates you to missions?

Notes